

# The Greater Caribbean Safeguarding Initiative

The Greater Caribbean Safeguarding Initiative (GCSI) is a collaborative effort between the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) and its partners in the Greater Caribbean Region (GCR). GCSI's long term goal is to protect participating countries and territories from the introduction and establishment of high-risk plant pests by establishing a perimeter approach. The GCSI seeks to harmonize and strengthen the on-going regional development of offshore pest detection, control and exclusion activities, and regulatory frameworks for the benefit of all countries and territories in the GCR. The scope of the program includes the Caribbean Islands, Central America (Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica), French Guiana, Guyana, Panama, Suriname, Venezuela, and parts of the United States including Florida, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

## Background

In 1999, a stakeholder review of APHIS' Plant Protection and Quarantine program's safeguarding system identified the need to harmonize pest exclusion strategies between countries and develop efficient, internationally accepted standards on a regional basis. The review, titled "Safeguarding American Plant Resources," recommended mitigating pest risk at its point of origin as the most effective approach to pest management. This approach includes identifying invasive plant pest and disease threats, developing preventive and control measures, and conducting research that mutually benefits the United States and its partners.

The Caribbean region was identified as a key priority because its countries are in close geographic proximity and have ecological similarities to parts of the United States in and near the Caribbean basin. Damage from pests that are present or established in the region—such as the pink hibiscus mealybug, red palm mite, red palm weevil, and cottonseed bug—pose a serious economic threat to agriculture in the GCR. Collaboration efforts are important to jointly mitigate

the risk for plant pest and disease introductions and spread among GCR countries.

In response to this risk, APHIS introduced in January 2006 the Caribbean Safeguarding Initiative (CSI) pilot program in Florida. The pilot program focused on activities of concern to Florida and targeted plant pests that enter the United States from Caribbean countries through Florida ports of entry. In July 2008, due to APHIS' increasing focus on regionalization and pest introduction prevention, the pilot program was expanded to develop the long-term GCSI. Many personnel from the pilot program—including Federal and State plant health officials and other cooperators—continue to play an active role in the expanded program.

The GCSI—a nationally focused program based at APHIS' headquarters in Maryland—continues to strengthen partnerships with GCR countries and strive for regional cooperation. Regionalized efforts offer access to collective knowledge and information-sharing, as well as focus resources on cooperative pest management activities. They also increase scientific and technical expertise in the region, protect the GCR from mutual pest threats, and facilitate regional economic growth in the GCR.

## GCSI Partnerships

The GCSI works primarily in partnership with the National Plant Protection Organizations of GCR countries. Additional stakeholders include: international and regional organizations, university and other research institutions, industries, associations, Federal and State agencies, and the general public. The GCSI collaborates with these stakeholders to achieve its strategic goals and to identify and coordinate critical regional plant health safeguarding strategies. GCSI is dedicated to enhancing collaboration, coordination, and outreach with strategic partners and with external agencies and stakeholders. Strong partnership within the GCR is key to the initiative's success.

## Strategic Goals

GCSI strategic goals are designed to support a regional perimeter safeguarding approach and prevent the introduction and spread of high-risk plant pests and invasive species into the GCR. GCSI's four identified strategic goals are: 1) build a coordinated GCSI framework and partnership network; 2) strengthen regional and national pest exclusion activities within the GCR; 3) enhance pest detection activities within the GCR; 4) strengthen pest mitigation and suppression activities within the GCR.

## Long-term Sustainability

GCSI is committed to the success and long-term sustainability of its collaborative efforts. GCSI will endorse pest exclusion and mitigation projects and activities that are considered to be necessary, feasible, and well-designed. To maximize efficiency and effectiveness, GCSI activities will incorporate plant health safeguarding strategies with proven track records and build upon existing initiatives where possible. All GCSI-sponsored projects will strategically integrate training and capacity building exercises to promote cooperation in the region.

GCSI will periodically evaluate ongoing projects to determine their effectiveness and to identify and address challenges. Additionally, program partners will review those efforts that achieve positive outcomes and look for ways to make them transferrable and sustainable throughout the region.

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